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ABSTRACT

A study of the philosophies and practices of community-based literacy programs focused on their nature, characteristics, and needs. Five activities were conducted: determination of criteria for defining literacy programs as community-based; program identification; survey and interview of program directors; meetings and follow-up conversations with community-based groups; and data analysis and report development. Data were collected from 24 literacy programs. Characteristics of community-based literacy programs in 10 categories were studied. The programs saw themselves as having a broad mission. Programs had two sets of objectives--program outcomes and learners' objectives. They generally served a different, harder to reach population of illiterates. A comfortable, accessible, nonacademic and nonthreatening setting appeared to be an important determinant of success in reaching and retaining learners. Most found word-of-mouth an effective recruitment technique. They tended to rely on group processes or a mixture of group and one-on-one instruction and to use teachers rather than tutors. Most used an eclectic approach and drew materials from a variety of sources. Extensive support for learners in class and outside was typical. Programs cited a variety of outcomes and an average retention rate of 65-70 percent. Action to address programs' needs was recommended. (YLB)

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ADULT LITERACY:

A STUDY OF COMMUNITY BASED LITERACY PROGRAMS

Revised and Updated
September, 1986

Volume I.
STUDY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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PREFACE

This report is the result of research first conducted in 1983, and updated in 1986, aimed at discovering some of the unique characteristics and practices of community based approaches to literacy education. Perhaps the most significant characteristic discovered is that the educational approach is learner-centered, while responding to broader, community-wide aspirations. This is a natural outgrowth of the evolution of community based educational institutions, which grew out of movements promoting empowerment and self-reliance for poor and oppressed people and communities.

In both the 1983 and the 1986 surveys of community based groups (including both members and non-members of the Association), the many difficulties faced by community based organizations became abundantly clear to us. Problems intrinsic to the work -- and they are many -- are compounded by isolation and lack of useful information and resources. Although some progress has been made since 1983 in sharing ideas and information among community based groups and with other "mainstream" literacy practitioners, there is much more that needs to be done. Our recommendations at the end of this report seek to alleviate some of these problems.

The hard work of a number of people made this study and report possible. Kamer Davis directed the study and authored the original report. Joan Eads coordinated the two meetings which were held in conjunction with the 1983 report, and assisted in the data analysis. Guitele Nicoleau conducted the 1986 survey, revised the data accordingly, and updated the report.

We are grateful for the time and resources contributed to the project by those organizations that participated in the surveys. We also wish to acknowledge the critical role played by B. Dalton Bookseller, not only in financing the study, but also in providing guidance, advice and helpful suggestions.

C. P. Zachariadis
Executive Director
September 30, 1986

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INTRODUCTION

Adult Illiteracy: A problem which must be addressed

Adult illiteracy, whether viewed as an isolated phenomenon or as part of a larger complex involving poverty, joblessness and cultural-political powerlessness, has emerged in recent years as a matter of pressing concern. Although our nation is one of high basic literacy -- close to 95% of the population has mastered the bare rudiments of reading, writing and ciphering -- basic literacy does not translate into the ability to function effectively and fully in society. An ability to read at the second or third grade level may be enough to get around town or sign one's name, but it virtually guarantees economic powerlessness in today's technically complex world. This is particularly true because low levels of literacy are typically associated with other problems, such as poverty and discrimination based on minority status.

In the United States today there are at least 23 million persons who can be described as functionally illiterate-- that is, unable because of lack of literacy skills to function independently and productively. Still more can be defined as undereducated -- lacking the basic skills assumed to be possessed by a high school graduate. As the workplace becomes increasingly technologically complex, and as society's ability to subsidize its less productive members continues to shrink, literacy will become an even more critical survival skill.

The fact that one of the most advanced nations in the world has serious problem of adult illiteracy and undereducation has not gone unnoticed. A number of programs have been set up, the largest of which are the federally funded Adult Basic Education Program and the volunteer programs operated through Laubach Literacy and Literacy Volunteers of America. However, these programs are reaching, at most, only about four million people. The adult basic education programs, operating through the public school system, and the national volunteer programs operating primarily with middle-class volunteers, tend to attract only the "cream" of the illiterate population--persons already comfortable enough with traditional educational norms to self-select into the programs.

The classroom-based model presents major problems for persons with a history of alienation and failure from conventional education. Most of these illiterates simply stay away: others quickly drop out.

The national volunteer programs are often conducted in home settings, eliminating the stigma associated with "school" programs. However, since the tutors tend to focus on a fairly narrow range of reading and mathematical skills, rather than address literacy in its social and economic context, they may fail to reach people whose needs extend beyond the training they can provide.

This is not to deny the very real accomplishments of these programs. The adult basic education programs have helped thousands of people resume and successfully complete long-interrupted schooling, and the volunteer programs can point with pride to their success stories-- people who after a lifetime of frustration have finally learned to read. But the problem of illiteracy is too large-- and too complex-- to be addressed by these approaches alone.

Community Based Literacy Programs: A Different Approach

Another approach -- and one that is proving highly successful-- is that taken by community based educational institutions. These are programs set up to serve a given geographical area and constituency--usually disadvantaged. They are formed by their constituencies--including urban Blacks, reservation and urban Native Americans, Chicanos, welfare mothers, farmworkers,and other low-income, underserved groups--to meet specific needs that exist within the community. They often link education and community development activities. Their methodological approaches are non-traditional, to meet the needs of those whom traditional education has failed, and learner-centered, focused on helping learners meet objectives they themselves set in response to their own needs.

Collectively, CBEIs represent effective and tested answers to problems that have plagued adult education for decades: they provide meaningful educational services to millions of adults (conservative estimates place this number at more than 20 million) disenchanted with or unable to use the conventional system; they have developed diverse approaches to learning always tailored to the specific needs of the student; they are structured to be accountable to the people in the communities within which they operate; they are responsive to community aspirations, maintaining an active commitment to a mission of community development; they have developed strong linkages with the community, integrating learning with the life and work experiences of the learner; they are easily accessible to community people because of their existence within the community; they offer low cost services consistent with client needs; and they are cost-efficient, using existing community resources, and avoiding wasteful physical plants.

Because CBEIs serve low-income inner-city and rural communities-- the communities in which illiteracy is most prevalent-- their programs often include a literacy component. Because CBEIs have close ties to the communities they serve, they are often able to attract students who would not align themselves with a public school-based program or one staffed by volunteers from outside the community. Because they offer a holistic, learner-centered approach to meeting the needs of their constituents, their literacy programs are different from those offered by more traditional groups--and often highly successful.

A Lack of Information About Community Based Literacy Programs

Despite the successes of community based literacy programs, relatively little is known about them. With the exception of members of the Association for Community Based Education, they rarely have linkages to other programs or to national associations. Instead, they operate at a strictly local level. They have seldom been consulted when national strategies to overcome illiteracy are being considered. Their successful approaches are rarely examined as replicable models. Their innovative ideas go largely unnoticed.

This neglect is not intentional, but rather appears to be a function of people simply not knowing what, exactly, these community-centered groups are accomplishing at the local level; and also, perhaps, not knowing how best to involve independent and autonomous local practitioners in a national agenda for change. Because community based groups are small, and locally based, and because they lack the time or resources to write up their successes, their efforts seem to "fall through the cracks," to the detriment of the field as a whole.

Certainly these groups have a great deal to offer. At the local level they are working at the cutting edge of program development. And nationally they are an as yet untapped force for productive change. They can be an effective voice from which the whole literacy field can benefit.

The Purpose of This Study

In 1983 the Association for Community Based Education (ACBE) attempted to overcome some of the lack of information about community based literacy by gathering information from groups around the country, and documenting it. The study was designed to meet three basic objectives:

- To identify approximately 30 community based literacy programs around the country
- To describe their unique and oustanding characteristics
- To define their needs, and recommend national intiatives that could help them meet these needs.

In the spring of 1986 ACBE updated the original study by collecting profiles of seven new programs, collecting additional information from groups included in the original study, and removing information about groups no longer in existence.

This report presents the study's findings, conclusions and recommendations. It is neither the complete word nor the last word regarding community based literacy.

Rather, it is an exploratory effort which, hopefully, will mark the beginning of a new communication, a dialogue that will be of benefit to all.

Organization of the Report

The report consists of three chapters.

Chapter I-- Study Methodology describes how the groups to be included in the study were selected, the selection criteria used, and the major activities of the study.

Chapter II--Key Characteristics of Community Based Programs describes the study's findings regarding program missions, objectives, participants, setting, recruitment, learning approaches and techniques, materials, support for learners, outcomes, and retention rates. It also describes three programs which provide technical assistance to community based groups.

Chapter III--Conclusions and Recommendations presents the study's conclusions regarding community based literacy, and makes recommendations for addressing community based programs' major needs.

Volume II of the study, *Profiles of Community Based Literacy Programs* , provides summary profiles of the 31 programs described in the study.

INTRODUCTION TO THE REVISED EDITION

Since 1983, when the Association for Community Based Education (ACBE) conducted its study of community based literacy programs, much has happened in the field of adult literacy. Through new initiatives taken by the state, local, and federal government, and by the private sector, and through the considerable attention given to the subject in the print and electronic media, the public's awareness of illiteracy in the United States has been considerably heightened.

In all of this flourish of activity, community based literacy programs have received significant recognition for their ability to reach "the hardest to reach" sectors of the U.S. population which the other volunteer-based, and Adult Basic Education programs generally do not reach. Equally importantly, the community based approach to literacy has gained recognition for its inherent ability to deal directly with illiteracy and its most common sister problems of poverty, economic underdevelopment and fundamental social and political alienation.

The 1983 study carried out an extensive survey of sixty-eight literacy programs and arrived at a comprehensive description of the key characteristics of twenty-four community based literacy programs. In this revised edition, we surveyed an additional twenty-two programs, seven of whom are included in the narrative and profiled in the supplement to the study, Profiles of Community Based Literacy Programs. The 1983 study alerted the U.S. public to the existence of community based literacy programs, and provided the groundwork for understanding the tenets of those programs. In the three years between the study and its revision, however, ACBE has learn 1 more about community based literacy, its philosophy, its methodologies, its practices, its needs.

We have come to realize, ever more forcefully, that community based literacy programs have a broad range of characteristics. Thus, arriving at a single model or definition is a difficult, if not impossible feat. On the other hand, we can say that there are some salient characteristics which shape the practices of most community based literacy programs.

One of those characterisitics is, first and foremost, the mission and purpose of the programs. As the 1983 study showed, the programs do not view literacy as a set of decoding, encoding and computational skills. Nor is illiteracy viewed as an individual handicap. Literacy is only one element in their concern for the improvement of the quality of life for the individual and his/her community. It is viewed in its most global sense-- as economic, social, and political literacy.

Central to the successful implementation of their mission is the redefinition of the learning process from which the participants had felt substantially alienated. This redefinition takes place in the choice of the setting, instructors/facilitators, the support for the learners, and the learning approach and techniques used to meet both the learner's and the program's objectives.

According to most of the programs, an important determinant of success in reaching and retaining the hardest to reach, non-traditional learner, lies in the ability to provide a non-threatening, non-academic, comfortable atmosphere. In the classroom, where only part of the learning is taking place, the student is not encouraged to be a passive observer and absorber. Since the teaching methodology is primarily learner-centered, the student becomes an active participant in his/her learning process. The learner's experiences, aspirations, strengths and weaknesses are the foundation upon which the curriculum is built. The phonics recognition and decoding and encoding exercises often revolve around material generated from the students. Their stories, their compositions are often the material used in classroom exercises.

Thus, reading and writing are not abstract, mythified exercises reserved for an elected, chosen few, but are experienced in direct relation to the events, perceptions, and lives of the learner. This process is found to be most effective in a group setting, where the learner can exchange experiences as well as knowledge. In this setting, the competitive edge found in traditional programs is virtually absent. Mutual support, respect and encouragement are of the essence.

To assure the creation of such an atmosphere, the instructor's role is equally non-traditional. He or she becomes more of a facilitator capable of molding the life experiences of the learner into a group learning activity. Besides the basic requirement of linguistic competence, the instructor is selected for his/her capacity to empathize with the concerns of the community being served.

In the programs, the learners generally find an atmosphere of support to help them overcome the psychological and material hurdles which have traditionally acted as impediments to their learning process. This support, again, is not experienced in the passive form of a social delivery system which tends not to involve the learner's active participation in determining the means for addressing those impediments. Rather, in the programs which offer economic development, parenting, health counseling, and other concurrent programs, the learner is involved in identifying the need, organizing, and implementing those programs. In addition to developing concurrent programs, the learners are encouraged

to be involved in many other activities including workshops and seminars devoted to skill building in areas of participant concern, and advocacy activities on behalf of community concerns.

If we had to construct an ideal community based literacy program, all of the above would have to come together to form a dynamic program which encompasses the educational, social, economic, and political development of the learner and his/her community. Most of the programs surveyed successfully bring together one or more of the characteristics described above. Often subject to fluctuating funding tendencies, the programs attempt, with very little funding, to handle the multifaceted demands of their learners and to provide continuity in the learner's and the community's development.

In order to address the varying levels of literacy needs, varying community based programs have sprung up throughout the communities. We have been able to identify three types of literacy programs using the community based literacy approach: a) the multipurpose centers; b) the feeder programs; c) the strictly literacy programs.

The multipurpose centers, usually grassroots organizations, offer a variety of programs of which literacy is only one part. The concurrent programs arise out of a need identified either by the learners or other members of the community active in any one of the programs. In these centers, literacy is often an outgrowth of another program which might have been launched as a community development process. All of the programs ranging from advocacy to skill development often entertain a symbiotic relationship, and help to create an atmosphere conducive to working towards community change and development.

The feeder programs, usually found in the community based colleges, offer another level of literacy instruction. Most of them are involved in preparing students to enter into higher education. They offer from intermediate literacy instruction to GED preparation classes. These programs, unlike traditional remedial programs, still tailor their curricula to reflect the needs and experiences of learners, and of the community. Once having passed the GED examination, the student finds his/her place within the college if he/she chooses to attend. When the grassroots literacy programs cannot accomodate the more advanced learners, they refer them to the feeder program, if one exists in their community. The community based environment of these colleges is an important element in the successful retention of adult learners. While the community based college is an institution of higher learning, it does not see itself as a body, independent of the

community which provides it with its directions, policies and curricula.

The strictly literacy programs generally view themselves as educational institutions offering literacy instruction from the zero to eighth grade level. The students only attend classes there but are referred to other programs which might meet their other needs. Beyond an intermediate or advanced level, the students are often referred to the community based college feeder programs which offer a higher level of literacy instruction. Though these programs may not offer the range of other programs found in the grassroots organizations, they nevertheless are actively involved in community activism around issues identified by the learners and the community at large. The community still finds in these programs an institution which can help it articulate and actively work for community change. As funding becomes available, many of the strictly literacy programs are expanding their programs to include components such as parenting and economic development projects.

Much has been said about community based literacy programs' ability to reach the "hardest to reach" sectors of the U.S. population. As the 1983 study pointed out, when discussing evaluation and outcomes, the community based literacy programs can proudly boast a 70% retention rate as compared to other programs' 30-40%. They equally offer anecdotal examples of learner's increased self-confidence and increases in learners' grade point reading levels and overall community involvement.

The programs, justifiably, feel that their reputation in the community is good, as evidenced by their ability to recruit students without running massive ad campaigns. The learners enrolled in the programs are the recruiters for what many of them recognize as essentially their program. The community based literacy programs usually have more interested students than they can accomodate, and most of them maintain a waiting list.

While these factors reflect positively on the programs, they are not the "hard" data often mandated to evaluate the success or failure of programs. As was pointed out in the 1983 study, there is still a need for a more rigorous process to objectively measure the attainment of the non-quantitative goals and objectives of community based literacy programs. Such an evaluation instrument would have to seriously consider the long- range aspects of the goals established by the programs. Improving the quality of life of an individual or a community at large, attaining political, economic, and social literacy are not goals and objectives that are easily measured within a limited

period of time. The outcomes spoken of by the programs, such as improvement in reading; students graduating or obtaining their GED; students returning to the programs as volunteers in a teaching or assistant teaching capacity; or students going on to further schooling or indicating community consciousness, can be perceived as stages towards the attainment of the programs' global objectives. Most of the programs are relatively young. It is probably only in time that we will be able to evaluate their qualitative impact.

As the field of literacy expands to include new programs, new initiatives, the question "what is a community based literacy program?" continues to arise. In 1983, we attempted to answer that question by providing a comprehensive description of community based literacy programs. In this stage of our knowledge and understanding of community based literacy, and in light of the developments in the field of literacy both nationally and internationally, we are aiming to arrive at a concerted articulation of the philosophy and methods that shape the core of the practices of community based literacy programs.

Such a project would not only provide a concise answer to the above question, but would also be instrumental in strengthening community literacy programs. This project would a) monitor, evaluate, and document the practices of effective community based literacy programs; b) generate publications, including descriptive reports, evaluation studies, statistical information, conceptual papers, curricula and relevant research; and c) develop and conduct a structured training program in methods of community based literacy. In addition to strengthening already existing community based literacy programs, this project would also serve individuals and/or organizations interested in starting their own programs.

The future of community based literacy programs depends on their ability to affirm with more authority the qualities which have thus far given them significant recognition for reaching the segments of the U.S. population most affected by illiteracy and its most common sister problems of poverty, economic underdevelopment, and social and political alienation. With very little resources at their disposition, community based literacy programs have made great strides in tackling illiteracy in all of its complexities. This study constitutes just one small contribution to the national recognition they are due. We hope that this study will be one piece in a long list of documents on the community based literacy approach and practices.

Chapter 1

STUDY METHODOLOGY

1. *STUDY METHODOLOGY*

Between January 1 and June 30, 1983, the Association for Community Based Education conducted a study of the philosophies and practices of a number of community based literacy programs in the United States. The study sought to provide useful information regarding the nature, characteristics and needs of these programs by answering three basic questions:

1. What is community based literacy education--how can it best be defined?
2. What are the shared and noteworthy features of community based programs?
3. What action is needed to support community based literacy programs?

Answers were sought through the five activities described below.

Activity 1--Determine Criteria for Defining Literacy Programs as Community Based.

What is "literacy?" Some have said it is the ability to read and write. But what does that mean? Read what? Write with what degree of skill? Others define literacy in terms of skills needed to function competently. Still others have sought to define types of literacy. There is "human literacy;" "technical literacy;" "social literacy." Definitional problems are compounded when one attempts to define "community based literacy." How does a community based program define literacy? What does it mean to be "community based"?

One of the purposes of this study was to better understand what community based literacy education is through a study of operating programs. However, some preliminary definition was necessary in order to be able to select programs to study. Based on discussions with organizations claiming to be community based, as well as ACBE's research into the field of community based education, six preliminary selection criteria were developed.* Groups meeting four or more of the criteria would be included in the study.

The six preliminary criteria are:

A. The program has a local base and focus--serves a definable constituency within a given locality, using indigenous staff.

* Further explanation of the assumptions regarding community based education which led to the selection of these criteria can be found in the Introduction to this report, in Chapter III of the report, and in the ACBE publication series Standards of Performance for Community Based Educational Institutions.

B. The program is independent--it is autonomous and locally managed, operating outside the formal public education system. Decisions regarding program content and methods are made at the local level.

C. The program serves learners traditional programs do not reach--serves "hard to reach" populations such as the poor and those at the 2nd grade reading level.

D. The program has objectives of economic and social self- sufficiency--seeks empowerment of the individual and development of the community; seeks to end dependence.

E. The program incorporates learners' own objectives into the program design--seeks to meet learners' expressed needs rather than develop a prescribed set of skills.

F. The program emphasizes learner-centered methodologies-- emphasizes participation, with teachers or tutors playing a facilitative rather than a didactic role.

During Activity 4 of the study the criteria were reviewed by a number of community based practitioners. Conclusions regarding the criteria, based on the review and the study findings, are presented in Chapter III of this report.

Activity 2--Identify Programs

The process of identifying community based literacy programs began in talks with 14 ACBE members who were currently or formerly involved in literacy education, and with other groups already identified through previous research. They provided valuable suggestions for additional groups to contact, and those groups in turn suggested others. Discussion with other community based organizations and literacy practitioners provided further names.

To widen the universe further, a listing of over 6,000 literacy programs nationwide was purchased from Contact, Inc. After purging from the list traditional colleges, groups operating under the auspices of government agencies, national volunteer association affiliates, and service or product vendors, approximately 125 names of apparently locally based groups remained.* Sixty names were added by referral, for a total of 185 groups.

* These figures reflect the 1983 program survey. For the revision, the same methods for obtaining information on the programs were used, with the exception that we did not hold another meeting of literacy providers. Findings of the survey conducted for the revision are included in the statistics in a "Summary of Responses" later in this chapter.

Activity 3--Survey and Interview Program Directors
Information gathering began with the development of a survey instrument (reproduced as Appendix A) and a series of preliminary phone interviews with groups identified through the initial referral process. Following these interviews, the survey instrument was revised, and mailed to the list of 185 groups.

A total of 68 responses were received. As responses came in they were reviewed to see if they appeared to meet four of the preliminary selection criteria. Twenty-four did. Follow-up phone calls were made to elicit additional information from these groups.

Certain groups, though not meeting four of the criteria, nonetheless appeared to have attributes of interest to community based groups. The responses of these twelve groups were placed in special "other programs of interest" and "programs offering technical assistance" categories.

Others were excluded from consideration, for one of the following reasons:

- Offering a volunteer tutor program affiliated with a national organization, with no major variations from the nationally recommended approach (14 groups)

- Offering English as a Second Language or other non-literacy programs (6 groups)

- No longer providing literacy education (3 groups)

- Working primarily with young people rather than adults (4 groups)

- Offering a traditional ABE/GED program (5 groups).

The chart below provides a summary of the responses received.

SURVEY RESPONSE SUMMARY	1983 Study	Revised Study
Mailed	185	22
Responses	68	10
Community Based Program Responses	24	7
Other Programs of Interest	9	0
Programs Offering T/A	3	0
Programs Not Included	23	3

Activity 4--Hold Meeting and Follow-up Conversations with Community Based Groups

Another major activity of the project was to sponsor a half-day meeting of community based literacy programs, held June 20, 1983, in Raleigh, North Carolina. The meeting was held in conjunction with a regional forum on literacy sponsored by the National Center for Service Learning. Having the two meetings "back to back" allowed for a cross-fertilization of ideas among community based and traditional groups that might not otherwise have been possible.

Participants at the ACBE meeting included community based practitioners, plus some presenters for the National Center for Service Learning forum who had expressed interest in attending. Staff from community based programs were asked to come to the meeting prepared to respond to the following questions:

1. What is community based literacy education?

2. What methods work best to reach and teach adult illiterates?

3. What possibilities exist for cooperation and collaboration among community based groups and within the literacy field as a whole?

4. What are your greatest needs in literacy education and what will help you meet them?

Participants' suggestions and recommendations, plus those of other program directors who were reached later by phone, have been incorporated into the analysis of findings, as reported in chapter III, "Conclusions and Recommendations."

Activity 5--Analyze Data and Develop Report

The study's final activity was to analyze the survey results, interview notes and meeting tapes and develop the original edition of this report. The original findings have been revised for this edition to reflect information received from new groups, and to delete program profiles prepared for groups which are no longer in existence.

Chapter 2

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF COMMUNITY BASED LITERACY PROGRAMS

2. *KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF COMMUNITY BASED LITERACY PROGRAMS*

What are the outstanding characteristics of community based literacy programs? What features make them unique? What approaches and methods contribute to the groups' success? What innovative ideas are being tried that other groups might learn from? These are some of the questions that guided this study--and that this chapter will attempt to answer.

This chapter is organized into 11 sections as listed below. Following the title of each section is a brief summary of key findings.

Mission In Literacy Education. Community based literacy programs often work for holistic change within individuals and within the community as a whole. Their concern with the improvement of the quality of life for an entire community of people often means that literacy is only one of a number of program goals. It also means that literacy is viewed broadly--as economic, social, and political literacy--rather than narrowly--as a set of encoding, decoding and computational skills.

Objectives. In looking at program objectives, often two sets must be considered--those which the program has as desired outcomes of its activities, in keeping with its mission, and those which learners bring with them to the program. Community programs have developed a number of innovative approaches to ensure that learners' individual objectives are met.

Participants and Communities Served. Community based programs generally serve a different, harder to reach population of illiterates than do the Adult Basic Education programs or the national volunteer programs. Community based programs tend to define their constituencies more narrowly than the national programs, and to be linked closely with the community they serve.

Setting. A comfortable, accessible, non-academic and non-threatening setting appears to be an important determinant of success in reaching and retaining non-traditional learners.

Recruitment. Most community based programs find word-of-mouth an effective recruitment technique, and have no problems attracting students. Among the more innovative recruitment techniques programs have used are door-to-door surveys and announcements in church bulletins.

Learning Approach and Techniques. Community based programs tend to rely on group processes, or a mixture of group and one-on-one instruction, rather than tutorial approaches. They often use participatory, "learner-centered" approaches and techniques that maximize learner involvement. They often seek to involve learners in a broad range of program activities, including workshops and seminars devoted to skill building in areas of participant concern, advocacy activities on behalf of community concerns, and asssistance to other learners.

Instructors/facilitators. Community based groups tend to use teachers rather than tutors, both paid and volunteer. Several of the programs see their group leader's role as more facilitative than instructional. An important criterion for selection as an instructor in many programs is empathy with the concerns of the community being served.

Materials. Several of the groups rely on in-house materials and student-developed materials. Most, however, use an eclectic approach, drawing materials from a variety of sources, selected to meet students' particular needs. Reliance on a single text or series of materials is rare.

Support for Learners. Extensive support for learners both in class and outside is typical of community based programs. Instructors, counselors and other learners provide the advice and encouragement learners need to stay in the program, and ultimately to move beyond it into more productive, self-sufficient lives.

Outcomes and Retention. Community based programs cite a variety of outcomes for their students, including improved reading skills, obtaining a job or a better job, obtaining a GED, and increased community consciousness. Anecdotal accounts stress participants' increased ability to function confidently and actively in the community. The average retention rate is 65-70 percent. However, it should be noted that many of the groups surveyed both in 1983 and in 1986 were unable to provide "hard" outcomes data.

MISSION IN LITERACY EDUCATION

Every program has a basic purpose and philosophy--a mission--to guide its operations. The mission is the *why* that underlies what the program does. Since we cannot fully understand what a literacy program does without some understanding of why it is doing it, a look at community based programs' missions seems an appropriate point to begin this discussion.

The programs included in this study are different in many ways. But in examining their organizational missions--as stated in their survey responses and accompanying brochures--common threads emerge. Few of these groups have as their underlying purpose the simple improvement of people's ability to read, write, or cipher. Almost without exception, they see literacy having a value greater than itself. Literacy is a means to a larger end--the ability to better control one's own life, or to contribute to the life of the community. The program's goal is not to help people read, but:

> "To empower women at the neighborhood level"--
> National Congress of Neighborhood Women
>
> "To improve the quality of life for area families"--
> Parent-Child Development Center
>
> "To create a new economic context for ourselves within our environment"--
> Institute for Community Education and Training
>
> "To develop and empower the neighborhoods in which we work"--
> Lutheran Settlement House
>
> "To develop literacy as a part of providing education, economic and cultural development for the Hispanic community"--
> Solidaridad Humana
>
> "To further educational and job opportunities for rural mountain women and improve the quality of life in rural communities"--
> Mountain Women's Exchange
>
> "To develop programs and activities supportive of American Indian economic, social, cultural, and educational needs in the Chicago Indian community."
> Native American Committee
>
> "To provide a meaningful lifestyle for those in our community and surrounding area through a wholistic approach to education."
> Dungannon Development Commission

The idea of literacy for a broader social purpose is a major theme in community based literacy education, and it finds expression in literacy activities which concentrate on the whole learner. Learners are helped to develop "human", "economic," "social" and "political" literacy, as well as the technical ability to encode and decode written language.

It is important to note that literacy education is rarely the only means by which programs work to achieve their missions. For example, twenty-two of the groups conduct other programs: a battered women's shelter, a home construction training program, health workshops and conferences, parenting classes, job training classes, concurrent programs for children.

Twenty-five groups studied in 1983 and 1986 have been actively involved in promoting a better quality of life through some form of advocacy. For example:

- Solidaridad Humana is working to redirect resources for public education into often neglected low-income communities

- PLAN (Push Literacy Action Now) publishes a nationally distributed newsletter to promote improved literacy education and conducts Operation Wordwatch, a program designed to encourage large companies and government agencies to make their mailings and forms easier to read.

- The Boston Indian Council works for the rights of Native Americans in the Boston area

- The Fortune Society advocates for improvement of the criminal justice system, by educating the public regarding its inequities

- The Mountain Women's Exchange works to influence legislation and employer practices that affect housing and job safety.

- The Institute for Community Education and Training has brought together an Employment Advisory Committee of local business people and community leaders to address employment problems.

- Highbridge Community Life Center advocates for lead poison screening in neighborhood homes

In short, literacy is typically neither a community based program's ultimate goal, nor the only avenue to reach that goal. Instead, community based programs generally view their learner's needs more broadly, and structure themselves accordingly.

OBJECTIVES

The distinction between program mission, program goals, program objectives, and objectives for learners is not always clear. Although a program objective is often defined as a desired, measurable change or outcome as a result of specified activities, a given program might understand the term differently. In order to avoid misrepresentation, information regarding program objectives was drawn from several sources.

First, in response to the survey questionnaire, each program provided a statement of both its organizational mission and purpose and its specific program objectives.

Second, programs provided brochures or abstracts telling more about how the program came to be and what their learners hope to achieve.

Third, follow-up conversations were held to clarify any questions or ambiguities discovered. In particular, an effort was made to clarify whether stated outcomes were anticipated as a direct result of literacy education.

The information was then summarized and analyzed.

The objectives of studied programs fit into one or more of the following five categories:

1. ***Individual independence, self-esteem and quality of life.*** Seventeen of the groups surveyed in 1983 and 1986 have stressed helping individuals function more successfully, confidently and self-sufficiently in meeting their life goals.

Bronx Educational Services, for example, tries to help people "develop confidence and pride as they acquire literacy and analytical skills." Solidaridad Humana seeks to "open opportunities for further education , career and personal development." Literacy Action attempts to help learners become "independent readers, writers listeners and speakers." The Lutheran Settlement House attempts to "expand people's control over their lives." A number of groups mention improving the "quality of life" for learners as a desired outcome of program activities.

2. ***Economic independence/job skills.*** Fifteen of the groups have focused on providing literacy training to help learners improve their employability, upgrade their job status, and find more satisfying work.

The Center for Literacy, for example, tries to help students obtain better jobs, if employment is among the students' personal learning goals.

The Institute for Community Education and Training works "to combat the large-scale displacement occurring as a result of resort development and to create a new economic context." Jobs for Youth offers literacy to "help people acquire jobs and continue learning."

3. Community or group empowerment. Fifteen of the groups have been concerned as much with the problems their constituents face as a group as those they face as individuals. These programs work to enable learners to successfully confront and resolve community problems that affect them.

The Fortune Society Tutoring Program, for example, offers literacy to help ex-offenders overcome the barriers that limit their participation in society. LaSalle University Adult Learning Project provides an "educational environment that is conducive to adult learning and empowerment and that promotes community leadership and community political and economic development." The Mountain Women's Exchange seeks to improve the quality of life in rural communities by "helping women develop the skills they need to assert themselves on behalf of their families and their communities."

4. Advancing educational goals. Twelve programs mentioned helping learners achieve their educational ambitions as a program objective.

The Appalachian Urban Development Center works to "help urban Appalachians achieve their educational goals." Dungannon Development Commission helps their students "meet their personal need to read and write." The Parent-Child Development Center seeks to "improve adult educational levels." Educational improvement may find expression in students' attainment of G.E.D. their continuation into other forms of education and training, or their enhanced ability to educate themselves.

5. Improving reading skills . Although all the programs work at improving reading skills, most see improvement in reading level as a means to achieving broader goals, rather then an end in itself. Only thirteen programs explicitly mentioned reading or functional literacy improvement as a program objective, and usually in conjunction with skills development in other areas.

Boston Indian Council, for example, states its desire "to provide reading, GED preparation and life coping skills." Bronx Educational Services seeks to develop "literacy and analytical skills." Jobs for Youth, St. Mary Human Development Center and Spanish Educational Development Center mention improvement in functional literacy as one of several aims. Only two groups, Push Literacy Action Now and Literacy Action, quantify the gains they hope to achieve, and only one group, Literacy Volunteers of Chicago, mentions literacy improvement as the only objective it hopes to attain for learners.

Most of the groups have objectives in more than one category. Only one group concentrates solely on the "traditional" objective of educational improvement or improvement in reading skills. Clearly, community based literacy programs are attempting to meet a broad agenda for change.

Although only six of the groups mentioned meeting learner's educational objectives in their statement of program objectives, nearly 2/3 of the groups surveyed do, in fact, incorporate learner's objectives into the design of their programs. They tailor curricula and group meetings to the participants' needs. They hold special workshops and meetings to respond to participant concerns. They encourage participants to participate in the design of activities and materials. They provide special exercises and materials for students with unique problems. Below are more examples of ways different programs take learner's objectives into account.

- ***Group Needs Assessment.*** Spanish Education Development Center and Solidaridad Humana each conduct group needs assessment with new groups of participants. Students discuss what their goals are and what they want to accomplish in the class, and then set priorities as a group.

- ***Individual Needs Assessment.*** Push Literacy Action Now and other programs conduct individual needs assessments when students enter the program. At PLAN, the teacher talks with each student, and notes particular concerns. The information is used to help design class activities. In addition, PLAN encourages students to regularly discuss their needs and concerns as a group.

- ***Community-Wide Needs Assessment.*** Barrio Education Project was noted in ACBE's 1983 study for its unique community-wide house-to-house survey and intensive follow-up interviews with prospective participants.* The Project used the findings of the assessment to design a program centered around the residents' most pressing concerns.

* The Barrio Education Project, Center for Literacy, Center for Rural Education, The Group School, and South Carolina Committee Against Hunger have all closed down. Though they no longer exist, they are kept in the study's narrative when they provide excellent examples of community based literacy. From here on, these groups will be accompanied with an asterisk to indicate that they no longer exist.

- *Cooperative Program Design.* A number of programs mention student participation in program design. Such participation serves two purposes: (1) it helps ensure that students' needs are heard and responded to, and (2) it builds communication and decision-making skills. At the National Congress of Neighborhood Women, students work with the teachers and the school board in selecting the materials and designing the curriculum. At the Mountain Women's Exchange students decide together issues they feel are important. They discuss ways that they can influence decisions regarding these issues. Then they act. They may attend community meetings, write letters -- the decision is theirs.

- *Individual Learning Plans.* Another way that programs identify and incorporate learners's objectives is by use of individual learning plans. Boston Indian Council staff develop learning plans with all students, and then let the students work at their own pace to meet the goals they have chosen. The Institute for Community Education and Training develops individual learning plans and assists the students in identifying and working towards their career and life goals.

All of these efforts represent a strong attempt by the programs to be responsive to their participants, rather than prescriptive. These programs recognize that their students are adults, with their own lives to lead and their own problems to overcome. A totally pre-set curriculum with each learning objective spelled out could never work for such learners. Instead, the programs seek ways to make the program fit the learners--by asking participants what they want to achieve, and then helping them achieve it.

PARTICIPANTS AND COMMUNITIES SERVED

Who are the participants in community based literacy programs? What kinds of communities do they represent?

In answering these questions, it may be helpful to first set forth the full spectrum of adult illiteracy. Hunter and Harman in their book Adult Illiteracy in the United States have suggested that adult illiterates can be divided into four broad categories, as follows:

- Group I--"those who share most fully the values of the dominant cultural group... Many engage in nonformal learning activities... Most are regularly employed...are embarrassed by not having a high school diploma and find this the most significant barrier to self esteem and job advancement." (pp.110-111)

- Group II--"...persons with far more educational deficiencies. They leave school earlier than the first group. Some never learned to read or write at all. Yet they belong to social groups in which literacy is taken for granted. Some have married literate persons. Some have jobs that require more literacy skills than they possess. For them, it is not merely the lack of a diploma that causes them embarrassment, but, rather, the tasks they simply are not able to perform. Many live in constant fear of being 'found out'." (pp.111-112)

- Group III--"...persons who suffer multiple deprivations...live in the inner city or rural poverty areas. The lack of credentials and the inability to perform tasks associated with literacy are only a small part of their lives. "The majority of this group left school because they were failing. They could see little immediate payoff in continuing schooling.... Those who persevere nourish a dim hope that self sacrifice and greater efforts on their part will, finally, make a difference." (p. 112)

- Group IV--"Persons in this group have largely given up believing that anything they can do will make a difference in their overall situations.... Their interaction with the majority culture is minimal. Encounters with bureaucracies set up to serve them.... all contribute to their sense of defeat and help perpetuate the cycles of deprivation and alienation." (p.113)

Participants in community based programs tend not to come from Group 1. The relatively well off members of Group 1 are more likely to take G.E.D. classes at the local high school. Community based programs are more likely to serve persons with incomes below the poverty level. Although many offer

SUMMARY OF PARTICIPANT AND COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS

ORGANIZATION	LOW INCOME	RACE/ ETHNICITY	INNER CITY	RURAL	READING LEVEL
Appalachian ID Center	x	Black/white		x	0-6th
Boston Indian Council	x	Native American	x		varies
Bronx Educational Services	x	Black and Hispanic		x	0-3rd
Center for Literacy	x	Multicultural			3rd-average
Center for Rural Education	x	Hispanic		x	0-3rd
Dungannon Dev. Commission	x	White/Blk		x	1-3
Fortune Society	x	Black	x		2.7-average
Group School	x	Multicultural	x		0-7th
Highbridge Comm. Life Center	x	Blk/Hispanic	x		0-12.9
Institute for Comm. Education/Training	x	Black		x	3rd-9th
Jobs for Youth Inc	x	Black	x		4th-average
LaSalle Adult Learning Project	x	Multicultural	x		3-8th
Literacy Action	x	Black	x		Less than 3.5
Literacy Volunteers of Chicag	x	Multicultural	x		0-12th
Local 237 ABE/GED	x	Black	x		4.5-5.5

ORGANIZATION	LOW INCOME	RACE/ ETHNICITY	INNER CITY	RURAL	READING LEVEL
Lutheran Settlement House	x	White	x		0-8th
Mountain Women's Exchange	x	White		x	0-3rd
National Congress of Neighborhood Women	x	Black and Hispanic	x		O and above for ESL/7-8th for GED
Native American Committee	x	Native American	x		6.5
Navajo Community College	x	Native American		x	4-9th
New Horizons for Children	x	Black	x		1-8th grade
Parent-Child Dev. Center	x	Multicultural		x	6th-average
Project Literacy	x	Multicultural	x		6-10
Push Literacy Action Now	x	Black	x		0-4th
St. Mary Human Dev. Center	x	Black		x	3rd-6th
Solidaridad Humana	x	Hispanic	x		0-3rd
South Carolina Comm. Against Hunger	x	Black	x	x	
Spanish Educational Dev. Center	x	Hispanic	x		varies
Telamon Corporation (Migrant Seasonal Farm-workers Assoc.)	x	Haitian/ Hispanic		x	0-2nd
Urban Appalachian Council	x	Blk/White	x		0-6

GED training, they also focus their activities at reaching low reading level students.

Community based programs do serve Group II. PLAN, New York's Local 237 ABE Program and Southern Appalachian Labor Schools, for example, operate programs at job sites, programs designed to help working people who are hampered by their lack of skills.

Even more frequently, community based programs serve Groups III and IV--the groups that A.B.E. and national volunteer programs find the hardest to reach. People in Groups III and IV tend to live in poverty, either in inner-city urban areas or in rural communities. They are often members of minority groups. They tend to have very low reading levels. As the chart on the next page shows, participants in the groups surveyed also tend to have these characteristics.

Bronx Educational Services, for example, serves inner city Blacks and Hispanics with little or no literacy skills. St. Mary Human Development Center serves rural Black women with little or no formal education. Navajo Community College Foundation Studies works with Native Americans who have low self-concept and who, over years, have built up learning blocks.

Community based literacy programs are usually identified closely with a particular constituency, which may be defined geographically (for example, the South Bronx, rural Tennessee); ethnically/racially (blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, Haitians); economically (low- income); by age (young adults); by sex (women); by experience (low reading levels, ex-offenders, parents); or by a combination of these. Characteristics most often emphasized are low-income (30 of the 32 surveyed groups serve poverty-level constituencies) and minority status (30 serve minority group members).

Interestingly, eight of the surveyed groups--almost a fourth--serve women. Why? Not because women's illiteracy rate is so much higher than men's, but because there are fewer opportunities for women elsewhere. As one program director put it "if we don't do it, there's no one else who will."

SETTING

"One reason community based programs work is that participants are comfortable in the setting." This comment by a staff member at Solidaridad Humana summed up the opinions of many community based educators. Many mentioned participants' need for a "non- threatening," "non-academic," "familiar," and "accessible" setting -- a setting that would in no way reinforce the sense of failure and isolation many participants have felt in formal educational environments.

Two distinct features of a program's setting appear to contribute to its "comfort factor" for students: the program's external presence in the community and its internal atmosphere. When potential students see a program as a part of the larger community -- involved in community concerns and easily accessible to community members -- they are more likely to believe that their own needs will be understood. When students see the program's internal administrative and classroom atmosphere as friendly, non-formal and relaxed they are more likely to overcome their fear of failure and actually dare to learn. Some specific ways programs go about creating a positive external and internal setting are described below.

New Horizons for Children offers classes in a church that many of its Charleston Heights constituents attend. Other groups have used storefronts, former apartment buildings , or townhouses to create a non-institutional atmosphere.

The Institute for Community Education and Training has its offices in a trailer. Not only is the trailer a comfortable, non-pretentious setting, but it's movable--so classes can be held in a place convenient to all.

The Telamon Corporation also takes the program to the learners, by going into migrant camps at night after work to teach. The staff point out that their students "are tired enough after working all day, without having to travel 20 to 30 miles to get to us."

Spanish Education Development Center has a townhouse in the heart of the area where its constituency is located. By offering day care services and encouraging community groups to hold meetings there, it has become a focal point for the entire community.

Literacy Volunteers of Chicago volunteer organizers arrange for tutoring to take place in recreation centers, apartment project lounges, and other community settings that are comfortable and easily reached by both tutors and tutees.

Project Literacy, along with other groups, uses an informal "learning circle" classroom set-up to encourage participation and downplay a sense of hierarchy in the group. The learning circles are held at students' homes, at social centers, and at the Project Literacy headquarters.

RECRUITMENT

None of the groups surveyed reported having problems in recruitment. In fact for many programs, the problem is the opposite-having to turn people away, or place them on a waiting list, because the program is already stretched as far as it could be.

Often, the students find the program, rather then vice versa. "Word- of-mouth" was noted as a recruitment strategy by 24 programs in the 1983 and 1986 surveys, as the main recruitment strategy by fifteen programs and as the only recruitment strategy by five programs. An important factor in recruitment success seems to be the program's setting. Having programs in a familiar, nearby location, attended by and often staffed by people from the community, is an incentive in itself.

Still, most of the programs have found it helpful to supplement word- of-mouth with other recruitment techniques, some of them quite innovative. The techniques include:

Newsletters. National Congress of Neighborhood Women, Mountain Women's Exchange, Boston Indian Council, and Local 237 have published their own newsletters, distributed locally. (PLAN also publishes a newsletter, but it is aimed at other literacy programs rather than at the community.)

Letters, Flyers. Literacy Action and other groups publish flyers. Flyers are distributed in schools, health departments, welfare agencies, stores and restaurants. Jobs for Youth in Boston sends letters to school dropouts.

Door-to-door Recruitment. Boston Indian Council has used home visits to announce the program and discover more about community concerns. Barrio Education Project* taped its interviews with community people, and used them in designing course themes.

Radio Ads. Radio is considered a particularly effective medium for reaching people reading at low levels.

Organizational Outreach and Church Announcements. Many of the groups rely on public and private agencies within the community to help spread the word. In communities where church ties are strong, enlisting church support in publicizing the program has proved helpful.

Community Organizing. When Literacy Volunteers of Chicago was starting up it used a method similar to the community organizing techniques of the late 60s. Organizing volunteers--many of them local college students--talked to people who wanted help in learning to read, to organizations willing to provide space, and to people willing to tutor, and brought them together. If

response warranted it, LVC created a local coordinating office to help train and assist the volunteer tutors. Now that the program is well established, it has no problem finding students.

Other Approaches. Newspaper ads, posters, referral through other agencies, and on-the-job recruitment by students are also used.

LEARNING APPROACHES AND TECHNIQUES

All of the programs included in the survey offer direct literacy education. Although the programs appear to be diverse in their educational approach, a number of commonalities underlie their surface differences. Some are:

- An emphasis on learner-centered methods
- An emphasis on developing control over one's personal and social reality
- Use of ancillary activities and experiences to promote program objectives
- Respect for learners' abilities, experiences, and goals.

The programs' diversity and areas of commonality are discussed in detail below.

A Diversity of Approaches and Techniques

On the surface, community based literacy programs vary considerably in their approach. For example, the program length may be six weeks, or two years, or simply "however long it takes"; the number of sessions per week can vary from one to five and the number of hours per week from one to twenty. Twelve of the groups offer instruction in group sessions; seven offer one-on-one instruction or tutoring; fifteen offer both group and individual instruction.

Diversity is further evidenced in the teaching techniques used. Among those cited by the groups are:

- Syllable-by-syllable phonics-based spelling (in a Spanish language literacy program)
- Freirian development of critical consciousness
- Problem posing/problem solving techniques
- Discussion of group-selected topics and work on key vocabulary
- Debates
- Flash card drills

- Role play
- Student presentations
- Creation of stories using group-developed vocabulary
- Parent involvement
- Student-developed workbooks
- Analysis of ways language is used to develop a new paradigmatic understanding of language
- "Anything that works"
- Peer tutoring
- Lectures
- Field trips
- Simulations of life situations such as applying for a driver's license in which a specific reading skill is required.

Programs range from the highly structured to the almost free-form. For example, Literacy Action, a structured project, has specific objectives for a nine-month course, designed to assist students in understanding the paradigm which underlies language behavior. Although student-generated topics and materials are part of the curriculum, the overall structure of the course is essentially preset.

The Native American Committee Adult Learning Center is much less structured. Classes are designed based on the results of ongoing needs assessment surveys, and the students set their own learning objectives.

Bronx Educational Services offers a mix of structured and unstructured training. BES has created a detailed workbook curriculum to develop reading skills among low reading level participants. Staff also encourage wide-ranging group discussions on such topics as tenant rights and city policies.

Push Literacy Action Now in Washington offers two classes each week: one is designed by the instructor, and the other is student-led and devoted to student-selected topics.

An Underlying Similarity -- Learner-Centered Methodologies

Beneath the surface diversity of programs several common themes can be discerned. One is an emphasis on participatory, learner-centered approaches. Sixteen of the programs stress this as an important feature of their program approach. Here are some examples of how this participation takes place:

- The Lutheran Settlement House encourages students to "share concerns in an open atmosphere"--to discuss problems, share information, suggest solutions, and, in the process, develop "social literacy."

- Bronx Education Services fosters a "group discovery process" in which the group members identify and solve problems relating to the structure of language and their personal lives.

- LaSalle University Adult Learning Project uses small group intreraction to provide the opportunity for the participants to relate their own experience to their learning.

- New Horizons for Children creates teams of either parents and children or student of similar ages to solve problems together and share their findings.

- Parent-Child Development Center offers experiential learning--field trips, games, role plays, simulations, and individual learning tasks, as well as the opportunity to assist in other Center activities --to involve its adult learners.

- Mountain Women's Exchange tutors also involve learners in other Exchange activities --meetings, discussion, herb growing and home weatherization projects, crafts production and sales are some.

All these approaches are essentially group-oriented; participants learn with and from their peers. Although it is possible to be an active learning participant in a one-on-one tutoring session, say, through Socratic dialogue, constant, active participation is typically more easily generated in a group environment.

It should also be noted that developing analytical skills in a group through discussion, a common feature in many of the programs, is an approach often associated with Paulo Freire. The "problem-posing/problem-solving" approach owes much to Nina Wallerstein. The ideas of these important pioneers in literacy education have been adopted more widely by community based programs than by other more "mainstream" programs. This choice is

understandable given these programs' emphasis on social, economic and political concerns as well as technical literacy.

A Further Similarity--The Concept of Developing Control Over One's Personal and Social Reality

Allied with the learner-centered approach adopted by many programs is another common feature--an emphasis on dealing with the personal and shared problems learners face in their lives. In discussion groups and learning circles the participants have an opportunity to reflect on their lives, to analyze the problems they collectively face, and to begin to develop solutions.

For some of the programs the personal dimension is primary: participants are encouraged to examine and resolve issues related to their individual needs as parents, or job-seekers, or tenants, or public assistance recipients. For others the personal dimension is seen as symptomatic of larger sets of problems affecting the oppressed community. Project Literacy, for example, has described the purpose and process of its learning circles as follows:

> *A learning circle is the medium where people look critically at real life problems in order to change these problems, after understanding them critically. ...We strive to create a lively and democratic forum, a process that will develop trust, mutual respect, and allow for a critical communication to develop among participants. ...We are...working to develop a teaching-learning construct that enables us to read both the text and our context--to perceive social, political and economic reality in a critical and critically hopeful way; to communicate in genuine and productive ways; to act together to get rid of the conditions that oppress and dehumanize us.*
>
> *Using codifications of real-life situations the process begins. (A codification is a sketch, skit, film, or photograph that characterizes daily-life conditions of the participants; their content emerges from ideas and concerns shared previously by the students in investigation circles.) For persons unaccustomed to the opportunity to speak and more accustomed to intimidation by teachers and other persons of "authority," this format is new and liberating. The learners speak their word; and in many cases this marks the first time their word is respected and appreciated by others in a formal learning situation.*
>
> *The learning circle is also a step toward engaging in cultural and social action. For example, a theme of one circle was problems faced by minority students in college. As we discussed the problems (through dialogue, reading, and writing), the group decided action needed to be*

taken and created the foundation for a minority college support group. The learning circle attempts to establish a link between word and action, for it is through action that words gain their power and meaning--and through critical words that action gains its clarity and effectiveness.

While not all the programs using discussion groups and learning circles would describe the content of participatory learning in such explicitly Freirian terms, all focus on the central idea of *working together to develop greater understanding and control over one's life.* Discussion is not aimless "conversation." Rather, it is focused toward a purpose -- individual or community self-sufficiency and empowerment.

Use of Additional Activities and Experiences to Promote Program Objectives

For many of the programs, literacy training is not the only means used to promote attainment of objectives. Other educational activities or experiences are provided concurrently. For example:

- Mountain Women's Exchange offers leadership training to help participants build their self-esteem and assume community leadership roles

- The National Congress of Neighborhood Women maintains a women's center, where participants can learn about issues important to working class women

- The Parent-Child Development Center has a Parent Council composed of representatives from each class; the Council helps make management decisions regarding the Center while learning leadership skills

- The Spanish Education Development Center presents discussion session on such issues as tenants' rights

- Jobs for Youth offers a business initiative program, which helps students set up their own micro-businesses

- The Institute for Community Education and Training offers workshops to help women begin thinking about entering into non-traditional careers

- Literacy Action offers "career literacy" education, which includes opportunity for contact with business executives and support staff.

- New Horizons for Children encourages parent-participants to become involved in a parents' association, and builds skills in dealing effectively with teachers and the school system.

- Lutheran Settlement House also offers self- development workshops.

Programs also provide a variety of learner support services, as discussed in a subsequent section. As these programs see it, the total mix of program activities--not the literacy classes alone-- is what enables participants to break the bonds of illiteracy and become functioning, productive members of society.

Respect for Learners' Abilities, Needs and Goals

Over and over in discussions with the study team, program directors and staff pointed out another commonality--their belief that illiterates bring to the program a strong base of experience and understanding that must be respected. Even though learners' understanding may be organized in such a way that they cannot draw upon it efficiently, it is there nonetheless. And learners also bring with them a fairly clear sense of what they want and need, a sense that staff must tap into and understand. As Carolina Rodriguez, director of the Barrio Education Project*, explained it:

> *Too often we teachers come into the classroom with a certain pre-determined idea of who our learners are and what our objectives are going to be and what the results are going to be. We spend a lot of time teaching from those objectives and very little time listening to find out if those objectives and results are the same for the person we are teaching. We need to be less egocentric... to recognize that what illiterates already know is valuable, and what they want to know is valuable. A teacher has to see the learner as a literate person, and help the person discover that for himself.*

Belief in the learner and the learner's potential for growth is, for Gardenia White of the Institute for Community Education and Training, an essential element in program success. "If a woman who can hardly read comes to us and says she wants to be a lawyer, we can't laugh at her and tell her maybe she should consider hotel work. We've got to believe she can do it--and with our help, she just might."

Programs trust participants to determine curriculum topics, take the lead in discussion, tutor each other, and engage in other activities of the program. And, program staff point out, it is because learners are respected that they are able to do these things successfully.

INSTRUCTORS AND FACILITATORS

As with other aspects of community based programs, there is both diversity and similarity in the way programs choose, train, and use instructors. One key similarity is the use of *trained instructors /group facilitators.* rather than tutors.

In this section, program instructor/facilitators will be discussed from the following perspectives:

- Selection Criteria
- Use of Community Personnel
- Paid vs. Volunteer Staff
- Training
- Instructors' Roles.

Selection Criteria

Instructors in any literacy program are chosen for their ability to help participants meet their literacy goals. The qualities deemed most useful in an instructor are usually defined by the program as a set of selection criteria. For an ABE program, the criteria usually conform to those required for teacher certification in the state. For a volunteer tutor program, criteria usually include a minimum degree attainment and expressed commitment to stay with the program. Criteria in community based programs tend to be more academically flexible than in an ABE program, and more rigorous than in a volunteer tutor program. The chart below lists the most common types of criteria in the programs surveyed.

INSTRUCTOR SELECTION CRITERIA

TYPE OF CRITERION	NUMBER OF PROGRAMS
Experience in teaching or literacy education	10
Sensitivity to learner needs	8
Community background or experience	6
Professional teacher*	6
College degree/ESL coursework	4
Facilitative skills or ability to develop rapport	4
Similar race/ethnicity	3
Creativity	3
Program graduates used**	2
GED or diploma	2
Commitment to community based education	1
Bilingual	1
Curriculum writing experience	1

**Note: Of the programs requiring a professional teaching background for instructors, four also use assistants with a community background as co-facilitators.*

***Note also: Other programs mention using program graduates as instructors or assistants, but do not indicate their use as a specific selection priority.*

Although skills and experience are seen as important, only six programs require a professional teaching background. (Of those, one explicity stated that teachers must have a proven ability to replace traditional pedagogic approaches with more learner-centered, facilitative techniques.) Nearly twice as many mention community background or ethnic/racial similarity to the learner population as a factor in selection-- factors rarely mentioned by either ABE or national volunteer programs.

Use of Community Personnel

Many of the programs are concerned that their staff be identified in some way with the community served. They may list community experience as a criterion, or may seek to use program graduates as isntructors and tutors.

Community identification is seen as important for at least two reasons: (1) it facilitates more accurate communication and (2) it allows staff and learners to work together on problems of mutual concern. Interviewees stated:

> "The closer you are to the people you're working with, the less likely you are to make wrong judgements about what's needed."
>
> "Unless you're from an oppressed culture, you're not going to understand the problems that oppressed people face."
>
> "People are less threatened when they're taught by one of their own."
>
> "We are all learners together, students and staff. we are concerned about what's going on here--what women can and can't accomplish--and we're working to develop new roles for women. I'm not saying that a man or an outsider couldn't be effective, but he wouldn't be as likely to have the commitment."

Paid Staff Vs.Volunteers

Volunteer support is an important feature of many of the programs. Twenty-three of the groups rely on community volunteers in some fashion. The number of volunteers ranges from one (at Jobs for Youth) to 300 (at the Center for Literacy). In many of the programs, volunteers act as assistant teachers, or co-facilitators, working with paid staff.

Seven programs do not use volunteers at all. The vast majority combine use of paid and volunteer staff. Volunteers serve as adjunct and assistant instructors, group facilitators, and one-on-one tutors (usually to supplement group instruction). Some of the combinations of paid and volunteers staff are described below:

- The Fortune Society, serving ex-offenders, uses ex-offenders as part-time paid counselors. They and paid teacher-administrators are assisted by 200 volunteers acting as tutors and teaching assistants.

- Bronx Educational Services uses former students as assistant teachers, and promotes them to teachers after they obtain sufficient experience. Staff members generally volunteer for eight to twelve months before being put on the payroll.

- Literacy Volunteers of Chicago uses volunteers of identify potential tutors and tutees and bring them together, as well as to tutor. A paid director coordinates the community-wide program.

- The Parent-Child Development Center uses many former students as program volunteers, working with paid staff.

- Push Literacy Action Now uses a variety of combinations of teaching staff, assistant teachers and tutors. Paid teachers are assisted by volunteer teachers, former students acting as assistant teachers, and volunteer tutors from the community. In addition, peer teaching and peer support are encouraged.

Of particular interest to the study team in analyzing these staffing patterns were two discoveries: (1) that volunteers are involved in many ways, not just as tutors, and (2) that all-volunteer efforts are succeeding without the support of a national affiliation.

Training

Most of the groups offer some form of pre-service training and in- service follow-up. Push Literacy Action Now is fairly typical: the program conducts an orientation session, a further de-briefing, and regular staff meetings at which instructors share problems and ideas.

The most comprehensive and extensive program is offered by Bronx Educational Services. Before instructors are accepted as full teachers, they spend a year as assistant teacher-in-training to become familiar with the curriculum. Readings are made available. Books by Freire, Gattegno, Bloomfield and other educational and linguistic theoreticians are read. Weekly conferences are held to discuss the reading and student-related concerns. Program Director Jon Deveaux believes that extended training pays off in the development of a competent, committed teaching staff, and ultimately, in the unusually rapid progress made by low reading level students.

Local 237, ABE-GED also places great emphasis on staff development, audio taping and video taping sessions, and analyzing the tapes to learn more about what does and doesn't work in literacy education.

Instructors' Roles

At Bronx Educational Services instructors spend much of their in-class time facilitating a process of group discovery, through which participants come to grips with personal and social problems and the structure of language itself.

At Push Literacy Action Now instructors strive to create a climate of trust in which participants will feel free to voice their own issues and concerns.

This view of the instructor as facilitator is shared by many other groups as well. It is the instructional corollary to participatory or learner-centered learning -- a process of helping the learners learn for themselves, by renouncing a dominant role.

For persons trained in traditional pedagogy, learning to "let go" is not always easy. (For this reason some projects prefer to train their own instructors rather than use professional teachers.)

Becoming a good facilitator can be a frustrating process. Director Carolina Rodriguez of the Bario Education Project* points out: "It often means undoing what we have been taught, how we learned how to teach, what we are. But we become more secure in dealing with the unknown. And as teachers, we are then better equipped to help students with the process of moving from the known to the unknown--the process of investigating, of finding out what is really happening, of learning."

MATERIALS

Since community based groups are organizationally autonomous they select their own materials, rather than having them prescribed by an outside sponsoring entity. (An exception to the rule among the groups surveyed is Literacy Volunteers of Chicago. Literacy Volunteers of Chicago uses LVA materials, but supplements them with staff-developed materials.) Among the groups surveyed, three different--but often complementary-- approaches to materials selection were found:

- Reliance on materials developed in-house
- Reliance on learner-developed materials
- Reliance on an eclectically developed library of existing materials.

Highlights of these approaches are described below.

In-House Materials

A number of the groups reported extensive use of materials developed by program staff. For example:

> Lutheran Settlement House Women's Program has developed materials on parenting, education, employment, Hispanic women's concerns, the world of work and other topics which they use in the program and make available to interested community members.
>
> Bronx Educational Services has a 350-page workbook that outlines an up to two-year curriculum. Beginning students (reading at a zero to second grade reading level) are provided exercises to help them develop both analytical and decoding skills, controlled-vocabulary reading passages to aid them in practicing their skills, and a number of writing exercises. More advanced students read selected newspaper and magazine articles, and work through short "how-to" spelling and self-help books. Much of the curriculum centers around "discovery learning"--a group process that helps learners teach themselves and each other.
>
> Spanish Education Development Center and Solidaridad Humana have also developed their own literacy curricula, focused on the needs of Spanish-dominant adults. Solidaridad Humana used minigrant funding provided by the Association for Community Based Education to publish its curriculum for use by other bilingual programs. The

curriculum stresses use of an "experience vocabulary"-- vocabulary generated by the students themselves, out of their own experiences and concerns. Even though the curriculum has been published, Solidaridad Humana emphasizes its constantly evolving nature. Experiences with each group of students are incorporated into the "next" version of the curriculum for the next class. Teachers meet at the end of each series of classes to highlight commonalities and recurring themes for use with succeeding groups.

The Telamon Corporation has developed an ESL teacher's Guide, and a series of audio and slide tapes. The slide tapes include "Immigrant Roots: Haiti and Her People" and "The Stream: Migrant Farmworkers on the East Coast." The migrant education program as a whole is described in the book *Light a Candle: A Literacy Program with Haitian Farmworkers*.

LaSalle University Adult Learning Project developed *What's on Your Mind?*, a manual used by the instructors and the class, which brings together stories written by various people (students included) and provides skill building exercises derived from the stories. The chapters cover areas ranging from unemployment to stress to values.

A number of interesting materials development projects taking place within non-community based groups were also found. Particularly noteworthy are the materials developed for handicapped learners by Woodmere Learning Center. In addition to materials for the physically handicapped and learning disabled, Woodmere developed an extensive program of computer-assisted instruction that other groups may find of interest. For further information, contact the Center at 261 Summit Street, Southington, CT, 06489.

Learner-Developed Materials

An approach to literacy education that has been used widely in Third World countries is to rely extensively on learner-developed materials. A number of the surveyed programs use this approach, either exclusively or in combination with other types of materials.

Barrio Education Project* relied exclusively on learner-developed materials, often in the form of class-generated sentences or stories. Students' sentences were written on a blackboard. Typically, each class began with a general discussion, followed by reading and writing practice. The group focused on key works and concepts generated during the discussion for the reading/writing portion of the class.

Other programs use similar approaches, including creating stories or essays as a group or individually writing and then sharing paragraphs. Facilitators generally try to keep their corrections to a minimum, since the aim is to get people reading the writing, not turning out grammatically perfect copy.

Bronx Educational Services, for example, created an oral history project. Students talk about their lives, together or alone, and teachers tape and transcribe their stories. adding exercises around them. Some of the themes that have emerged are "Coping with Illiteracy," "Education and Violence," "Parenthood" and "Childhood."

New Horizons for Children has a somewhat different approach. Over time, students create individual workbooks based on their own interests. Results of group problem-solving sessions are also incorporated into the workbooks, which become living records of the students' progress.

Eclecticism

The work that best describes most community based groups' approach to selecting materials is eclectic. The programs use whatever they find that works. They are constantly in search of materials that are easy to read without being condescending, and view the world from a perspective not too alien from the students' own.

Of all the eclectic approaches we came across, that of Push Literacy Action Now (PLAN) is probably the most thoroughly developed. The program maintains an extensive library. In it are kept multiple copies of a number of commercially developed series, and single copies of numerous other books, arranged by subject. The subjects include everything: there are numerous "how to's"--how to grow plants, how to get a driver's license, how to find a job--and even poetry--Emily Dickinson, Whitman, Shakespeare. Students and teachers are free to browse, to borrow, or to sit down and read. The teachers often visit the room with one or more students to help them find the information they are looking for. Teachers may use five or six different texts within a two-to-three month period, selecting from the lessons they feel are most appropriate to their learners' needs.

Groups interested in developing their own libraries may be interested in reviewing *Books for Adult New Readers*, a bibliography published by Project Learn in Cleveland Ohio. Although Project Learn is not itself a community based program, it shares with community based groups a belief in the importance of having a range of books available to meet learners' different styles and reading needs. In Cleveland, all the books listed in the bibliography are now available through the public library system.

SUPPORT FOR LEARNERS

Illiterates do not always make ideal students. Often, in self- protection, they have set up barriers to learning. Even when they have a high degree of motivation and a fair amount of self confidence, they are often plagued by personal problems that influence their ability to attend, concentrate, participate and learn. The "culture of poverty" that surrounds them creates many of their problems. A child may get sick; there may not be bus fare; a husband may complain about a wife's leaving home; it may become more urgent to find a job-- any job--than to learn to read.

Because these problems are both serious and pervasive, literacy programs must help participants deal with them, or risk high absenteeism and, ultimately, failure. All of the community based programs we surveyed offer at least one of the following kinds of support:

- Support in the learning setting, including peer support, instructor encouragement, and individual assistance and tutoring (see the sections on Learning Approaches and Instructors for examples of ways programs work to build an atmosphere of trust and openness among learners)

- Support through provision of additional programs, such as parenting workshops, leadership training, job training, financial planning workshops, career exploration workshops, health conferences, and others (see the sections on Mission, Objectives and Learning Approaches and Techniques for examples of additional program offerings).

In addition, many programs offer additional learner support services, as described below.

Additional Support for Learners

For years, federally funded job and language programs have included such support services as transportation, day care, and job placement services. Some of the community based programs also offer such services. The Fortune Society, for example, has an extensive job placement services for its ex-offender constituency. The Parent-Child Development Center offers free transportation and a hot lunch program as well. The Boston Indian Council has van pick-up and drop-off for students. The National Congress of Neighborhood Women has full-time day care facilities.

But the programs offer less traditional support services as well. For example:

- The Boston Indian Council offers educational, vocational and personal counseling, holds group workshops and discussion groups, and provides college and financial aid assistance.

- Bronx Educational Services has a job readiness component aimed at helping women become more employable. Workshops are offered, networks for jobs and job training are created, and job placement is provided as appropriate.

- New Horizons for Children, in addition to its parenting workshops, offers counseling to parents alone or to parents and children together.

- Highbridge Community Life Center is planning to set up a full service health clinic.

- The Fortune Society provides a counselor -- who is also an ex-offender -- for each student in the program, available to provide help with problems and ongoing advice and encouragement.

- The Institute for Community Education and Training counsels women in how to enter non-traditional careers, and offers assistance in forming and operating cooperative ventures.

- The Parent-Child Development Center operates its own thrift shop, and offers comprehensive counseling services.

These services, like the additional workshops and classes offered by the groups, are viewed as an essential element of the literacy programs. The services reflect a comprehensive, holistic view of literacy education which may be unique to community based groups -- and may be a significant contributor to their success.

Support By Learners

In keeping with their emphasis on "learning by doing," several of the groups involve students in providing support for the institution and each other as part of their learning.

Solidaridad Humana, for example, has a student delegate system that is designed to involve student in decision making and in the meeting of program goals. Each class selects two delegates, to act as facilitators within the class and to meet and plan activities with other delegates. Within the class,

the delegates help coordinate classroom activities such as cleaning up or cooking and selling food to provide working students with a meal.

The delegates may also help address the problems of other students. For example, recently a student was the victim of a fire, and the delegates took up a collection to help replace the victim's lost clothes and household goods. Often, the delegates will place calls to students who have missed class, to see what might be wrong.

As a group the delegates become involved in Solidaridad Humana's fundraising activities--dances, raffles, etc.--and cultural activities, such as exhibits of students' artwork and crafts. They help plan and promote the events, building their own skills in the process.

OUTCOMES AND RETENTION

The true test of a literacy program's worth is the change that occurs as a result of it. Most community based programs know what they want to happen, and express this intent as a set of program or learner objectives. Few, however, have the time and resources to rigorously document and evaluate the results that occur. Some, in fact, prefer to avoid subjecting students to assessment, feeling that it smacks too much of "school."

Of the programs surveyed in 1986, for example, only eight reported results of periodic testing to measure reading improvement. Twelve more provided some numerical data to indicate outcomes ("30 last year obtained a job." "Fifty percent of the women enrolled have passed the GED."). Five provided impressionistic or anecdotal data ("Our students have gained the confidence needed to make life decisions"). Eight provided no outcome data at all -- either because the program was new, or because the data were simply not available.

Lack of a great deal of "hard" data does not, of course, invalidate these programs' successes. It does reflect a need for information that exists throughout the literacy field. We do not have reliable data on the extent of the problem of illiteracy in this country. We do not have reliable data on the full extent of the resources available to serve illiterates. And we do not have reliable data on what happens to illiterates as a result of their participation in literacy programs, or subsequent to their participation.

Further research in these areas--and guidance for programs in conducting such research at relatively low cost--are sorely needed.

The study's findings regarding outcomes and student retention are presented below.

Outcomes

What outcomes do community based groups obtain for their efforts? Several different kinds were reported:

- Retention rates for the program as a whole (average, 70%)
- Average reading increases (1 to 1.2 grade levels per 100 hours)
- Students obtaining a GED
- Students obtaining jobs or going on to better jobs

- Students meeting their own competency objectives (drivers' license, passing certification exam, e.g.)

- Former students returning to the program as volunteers

- Students going on to further schooling

- Students gaining the confidence needed to make life decisions, feeling better about themselves.

In the area of reading improvement, student change was often expressed quantitatively. In the other areas the outcome was seen not so much as a changed behavior, as a new behavior resulting from program involvement. Outcomes were both tangible ("went on to take a nurses' aid course," "sixteen participants obtained jobs," "fifteen completed their GED") and intangible ("developed confidence to make life decisions").

It is interesting to note that involvement of former students either in the life of the community or in the ongoing operation of the program is mentioned several times. Using one's skills and abilities for the benefit of the community is a value held by many community based educational institutions.

Retention

An important interim indicator of a program's success is its student retention rate. Students who are not satisfied with what the program is trying to do "vote with their feet." If problems come up at home, or they do not see the literacy program as being particularly valuable to them, they will not show up.

Of the surveyed groups, twenty maintain retention data. Although lack of comparability among the data make generalization difficult, it appears that community based groups' retention rates -- which average between 65 and 70 percent -- compare favorably with retention in the federally funded Adult Basic Education program, which averages 25-50 percent.

When programs were asked if they conducted any special activities to encourage students to stay in the program, several responded that they did. Personal follow-up by teachers, phone calls to absent students, electing students to help with problems other students may be having, and a teacher-supported "taxi fund" for emergencies were cited.

Chapter 3

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3. *CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS*

This chapter presents the study's conclusions regarding the nature and characteristics of community based education, and recommendations for action to address community based programs' needs.

The conclusions derive from an analysis of the findings in light of the assumptions which guided the study's design. The study assumptions and conclusions are of two types:

- Assumptions and conclusions regarding the nature and characteristics of community based programs. Six assumptions guided the survey data collection effort, and were considered in analyzing the findings. The assumptions themselves were assessed by program directors in a series of in-person and telephone discussions and in a meeting of representatives of eighteen groups held in Raleigh, North Carolina, June 20, 1983.

- Assumptions and conclusions regarding program needs. The broad needs of community based groups have been discussed in the introduction to this report. These needs, inherent in the independent, locally based nature of the programs, have been amply documented in other studies of community based educational institutions. Similar needs were expressed by program directors in this study, and are reflected in the suggestions for action at the national level.

The first part of this chapter reviews assumptions and presents findings and conclusions related to each. Additional conclusions regarding the nature and needs of community based literacy programs are also presented. The second part presents recommendations for action in support of community based literacy education, based on the study findings and conclusions.

CONCLUSIONS RELATED TO STUDY ASSUMPTIONS

The findings of this study are dictated in part by its methodology. This was a survey of groups selected on the basis of six criteria. In attempting to draw conclusions from the findings, therefore, it seems appropriate to consider them in light of the study assumptions. How do the findings support the assumptions? How appropriate do the assumptions now appear to be, based on the survey findings and comments by practitioners? What common features emerge from the study that were not initially assumed to be characteristics of community based groups? Conclusions related to each of the major study assumptions are presented below.

Assumption: A community based program has a local base and focus

This criterion was defined as meaning that a program serves an identified constituent community within a limited geographical area, using indigenous staff. The definition was purposely broad. No attempt was made to define that kind of community that would be served, or the way that a local base and focus would be constituted.

In discussions with programs, however, it became clear that for many community based literacy groups the concept of local base and focus has an importance that goes far beyond mere location within a given community. A number of program directors pointed out that a community is a "community of like-minded people" rather than a locality, and that a "local focus" must therefore be seen as an emphasis on meeting the expressed needs of that community. One program director pointed out her belief that a locally based program is one created by and controlled by the community, emerging from its members in response to a perceived need. One suggested that a "local focus" represents not so much a narrowing of the program's sphere of educational emphasis to the local level as a broadening of its emphasis to encompass the community as a whole--in other words, community as well as individual development.

This emphasis on responsiveness and service to the community is reflected in a number of statements of mission and program objectives. Although definitions of what is meant by " community based" or "locally based" may vary greatly, concern for the community served is a strong unifying feature among almost all the programs studied.

Conclusion: Groups vary in their understanding of what is meant by the terms "locally based" and "community based," but common to perceptions is an emphasis on working with a particular constituency to meet its needs.

Assumption: A community based program is independent--not part of the formal education establishment, and not affiliated with a national program

Twenty-two of the programs surveyed met the "independence" criterion. (One ABE-funded migrant program and one program affiliated with Literacy Volunteers of America did not meet the criterion.) Independence was included as a criterion in order to ensure that the study would examine programs which are usually overlooked because of their lack of "mainstream" affiliation. However, independence turned out to be important for other reasons as well.

Program directors pointed out that their lack of affiliation with other institutions allows them a flexibility they might otherwise lack. As one participant at the Raleigh meeting put it, "The Board of Education in my city is constitutionally incapable of providing the kind of education non-traditional students need."

He went on to point out that prescribed curricula, an emphasis on meeting the needs of the mainstream majority rather than the non-traditional minority, and a reluctance to experiment often characterize established institutions, whereas community based institutions are set up specifically to provide a flexible, experimental alternative.

However, other participants at the meeting voiced a different opinion, pointing out that participation in an "establishment" program such as Adult Basic Education need not necessarily mean that the program must abrogate the strong community ties and programmatic flexibility characteristic of community based programs.

Although several participants pointed out their belief that affiliation with an "establishment" funding source or a national sponsoring organization need not necessarily constrain a community based program, most agreed that an independent organization was, in fact, in a much better position to respond to the needs of its constituency than an affiliated group.

Conclusion: Institutional independence is a key characteristic of community based programs, allowing them a flexibility that affiliated institutions tend to lack.

Assumption: A community based program serves learners more traditional programs do not reach.

Study findings indicate that community based programs are indeed reaching and serving "hard core" illiterates--those with the lowest incomes, lowest

reading levels, and lowest self-esteem. They are able to work successfully with the hardest-to-serve illiterate populations (groups III and IV in the Hunter/Harman identification of categories of illiterates, as described in Chapter 1).

Often, community based programs are designed specifically to reach such learners, because there is no other option for them available. Program directors build into their programs several features that appeal to non-traditional learners: (1) the programs are accessible and affordable; (2) the setting is non- threatening and familiar; (3) teachers are chosen for their rapport with students; (4) students' own needs are taken into account; (5) learners are able to proceed at their own pace; and (6) a non- competitive environment is set up.

Conclusion: Community based programs are successful in reaching and serving the hardest-to-reach illiterates; their programs are structured to respond to the special needs of such populations.

Assumption: A community based program has objectives of economic and social self-sufficiency for learners.

The central premise of community based education, as defined in the ACBE publication Standards of Performance for Community Based Educational Institutions, is that of linked individual and community development. One standard points out that an organization's mission and goals should affirm a commitment to the personal growth of learners, and at the same time to an increase in the economic and social well-being of the community served. Related standards focus on empowerment of individuals -- and through them, of the community. The standards stress that learning should be directed at enabling individuals to gain control of their lives and participate actively in the social, economic, cultural, and political life of their community.

It was difficult to decide upon a selection criterion that would reflect ACBE's understanding of the premise of community based education without too rigorously dictating what a program's purpose should be. It was agreed that it was certainly appropriate to expect a community based program to work for some form of "economic and social self-sufficiency." However, any more specific detailing of mission, purpose or objectives might serve to exclude worthwhile programs from consideration simply because they had not stated their purpose in "acceptable" terms.

Missions and objectives of economic and social self-sufficiency were found in the overwhelming majority of the programs surveyed. (see Chapter II for a fuller discussion of program objectives.) They included:

- Objectives of human literacy--improvement of the individual's quality of life and self-esteem

- Objectives of economic literacy--improvement in the individual's job skills and economic independence

- Objectives of community literacy--improvement in the lives of members of the constituent community as a whole and in the individual's ability to effect community change.

These objectives were also reflected in program activities and outcomes. Many of the outcomes cited were personal--students moving from a lifetime of isolation and dependency to connectedness and independence, through GED attainment, job improvement, or some form of further training.

Although literacy training is seldom linked to broad-based social action such as the registering of voters, it is linked to community action by individuals--students becoming involved in parents' councils to influence the schools, or in activity for tenants' rights issues, or in advocacy for the program. Clearly, in this regard, empowerment and self-sufficiency objectives are pursued.

Conclusion: Program objectives focus strongly on economic and social self-sufficiency and individual/community empowerment; program outcomes indicate that individual lives are changed through participation in the program.

Assumption: The design of a community based program incorporates meeting of learners's own objectives.

ACBE's Standards of Performance for Community Based Educational Institutions require that program designers ensure that learning is made relevant to participants' needs by building programs around participants' own learning goals. It was expected that a number of examples of program design tailored to specific needs would be found. But the extent to which this is occurring exceeded expectations.

The importance programs placed on meeting learner objectives was underscored in follow-up conversations with several of the respondents.

One program director pointed out:

> *Testing at a certain grade level doesn't tell a thing about what we need to teach. It doesn't mean that a prospective student knows what a second or third grader knows: These people have had a lifetime to learn since they were in the second grade. And it certainly doesn't tell you what they want to learn--what they're motivated to learn. You've got to find that out by talking to them, and then make sure that the program you offer will work for them.*

A literacy student remarked:

> *I came to this program after so many schools. And none of them worked. The difference here was he asked me, 'How can I help you?' I was surprised because other places just would fit me into their programs, but (here) they built the program around me, as a person..*

It should be noted that not all groups choose to incorporate learner objectives. Several have successfully applied a different premise-- one that could be expressed as "we've developed an approach that we believe will result in such and such; if you think that's what you want to achieve, you're welcome to participate." But they are clearly in the minority. Most of the programs have taken pains to incorporate learners' objectives into their designs. (See chapter II for a fuller discussion of how this is accomplished.)

Conclusion: Community based literacy program place a high priority on meeting learner's own objectives and needs, as opposed to applying a prescribed curriculum.

Assumption: Community based programs emphasize use of learner-centered, participatory methodologies.

Studies of adult learning have made it clear that learners do much better when they are actively involved in directing and controlling their own learning. It was expected, therefore, that almost all the community based programs surveyed would emphasize such methodologies. However, in 1983, this turned out not to be the case.

One can only speculate about why this should be. It may be that the discovery and incorporation of learner objectives is easier to accomplish than a radical departure from traditional approaches to teaching and learning. Programs which do not incorporate learner objectives tend to avoid doing so by choice, because they have a different agenda to meet. However, programs which do not adopt learner-centered facilitative approaches may be avoiding use of innovative techniques either because they are not yet comfortable with them

or because their instructors are not experienced enough to know how to "let go" successfully.

Interestingly, by the time of the 1986 survey, many more groups indicated a use of highly participatory methodologies.

Conclusion: Use of learner-centered, participatory methodologies is characteristic of many, but not all, community based programs.

ADDITIONAL CONCLUSIONS REGARDING PROGRAMS AND THEIR NEEDS

A Further Conclusion Regarding Programs and their Operations

One characteristic of community based programs not anticipated in the selection criteria is a comprehensive approach to education. Programs offering only literacy instruction are few and far between. Instead, programs offer training in such life skills as health maintenance, nutrition, getting and keeping a job, problem analysis, group leadership, parenting and affecting community change

They offer opportunities to work in the community, or advocate for issues. They offer counseling and other support to help participants overcome problems.

Conclusion: Community based literacy programs emphasize the whole individual and provide a variety of education and support activities to help develop overall ability to function.

A conclusion regarding what programs need

In general, community based literacy programs:

- Operate on tight budgets, with few resources left over to either document what they do or research what others are doing;
- Operate purely at the local level, with few linkages to other groups--and few opportunities to develop such linkages;
- Tend to be ignored or to "fall through the cracks" when funding or policy decisions are made at regional or national levels;
- Have little opportunity to share ideas and concerns either with other community based groups or with other "mainstream" practitioners in their field; and
- Have managed, despite these handicaps, to create innovative and successful programs with much to commend them.

Thus, a major question which the 1983 study sought to answer was "What needs to be done to increase opportunities for information sharing and cooperation among community based and other groups, and to afford the groups greater recognition within the field as a whole?"

At the community based literacy meeting in Raleigh and in follow-up conversations with survey respondents, program directors were asked to consider their greatest needs.

Respondents were particularly concerned with what would help them help themselves and each other. They wanted a voice for community based literacy--individually, through better communication and promotion within their communities; collectively, through networking and information sharing; and nationally, through greater attention to the problem of illiteracy and through greater consideration of community based literacy.

In making suggestions for what would help them meet their needs, the program directors did not seek to develop broad agendas for the federal government, foundations or the private sector, rather, they focused pragmatically on the kinds of national action that would most directly benefit them as practitioners. The major needs and related suggestion are summarized below.

Advocacy. Several participants noted that in the United States there is a Coalition for Literacy, and a U.S. Department of Education policy group on literacy, but that independent community based literacy programs are not represented in either body.

They suggested that ACBE could usefully represent community based literacy before such bodies, participate in hearings on Capitol Hill and provide lines of communication to the private sector to promote both community based literacy and the importance of literacy in general.

A further need suggested by program directors was to build greater recognition of community based efforts within the literacy community itself. Several program directors expressed concern at how little- known their efforts are within more traditional national organizations such as Laubach and Literacy Volunteers of America.

Information Sharing and Networking. Closely related to the need for advocacy is a need for greater contact and communication among groups involved in literacy education. Several practitioners echoed the beliefs that "we should let others know what we are doing" and "it would help if we knew more about other groups in our area." Several roles that ACBE could play in facilitating networking and information sharing were suggested, including:

-- "Provide a journal or newsletter"

-- "Provide some sort of reader service that will help link us as a coalition."

-- "Make presentations at gatherings of educators and literacy volunteers."

-- "Provide a brokering service that will recommend speakers that are knowledgeable about literacy for meetings and conferences."

-- "Create more opportunities like the June 20 meeting to allow information sharing and coalition building."

Issue Promotion, Public Relations and Marketing. A participant at the Raleigh meeting stated bluntly, "We have to learn marketing. We must convince corporations and community agencies that helping us is in their own best interest. We need help in peddling our product." Another pointed out that corporations either don't know that community based groups exist, or fail to recognize that something can be done about literacy. The need, therefore, is for programs to learn how to put our best foot forward.

Suggestions regarding what such assistance might entail included indentifying marketing opportunities, providing research and factsheets, writing brochures, or providing suggestions as to how necessary contacts and information could be developed at the local level. If programs were willing to share successful marketing tools, useful models could be provided for the benefit of others.

Technical Assistance. Program directors also expressed a desire for help in improving their programs. One, for example, felt that her instructors were more directive and traditional in their class facilitation techniques than she felt appropriate, and wondered if ACBE could help her find someone that could "demonstrate what they need to do." Another mentioned a constant quest for "materials that explain health information in language my students can read," and suggested that a bibliography would be of assistance.

Conclusion: Community based programs are particularly concerned about their lack of visibility in the literacy field, and their need to strengthen links with others working in literacy. Increased visibility and linkage are seen as factors in improving both managerial and educational effectiveness, and technical assistance is needed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the three years which have passed since the Raleigh meeting, significant national attention has been placed on the issue of illiteracy. Yet, despite the furor, little has changed at the program level. True, there have been national coalitions formed to bring the problem of illiteracy to the nation's attention and to promote the involvement of individuals and corporations in combatting illiteracy. And community based groups have been given "a seat at the table" in some of the discussions that have taken place. True, there have been new studies which have attempted to better quantify the nature and extent of adult illiteracy. There have also been studies which have looked at what is working to remedy the problem, and community based groups have been recognized for their accomplishments in some of them.

But despite the attention given illiteracy, and to programs working to combat illiteracy, and despite increased recognition for community based programs and learning approaches, community based groups continue to be underrepresented in discussions of proposed solutions to the illiteracy problem and community-based successes continue to be under-recognized and unheralded. Moreover, many of the needs of community based groups continue to go unmet.

It is not the intent of this study to recommend actions to be taken by or in support of individual groups to strengthen individual programs. However, the study has sought to look at ways community based groups as a whole could be strengthened. The following recommendations address specific actions that should be undertaken at the national level. They are based on still-valid suggestions drawn from the initial meetings with community based practicioners held in 1983, and additional suggestions from follow-up discussions held in conjunction with the preparation of the revised report.

1. *Advocate for the community based literacy movement*

As the debate over adult illiteracy grows, cooperation among the various groups concerned with literacy education is essential. Community based programs should be included in national coalitions, and their efforts should be more widely recognized within the literacy field as a whole. A national organization could advocate effectively for community based literacy by:

- Representing community based literacy programs in national-level coalitions and task forces;

- Contributing to the development of federal and state policies on adult literacy;

- Sponsoring meetings that bring together practitioners from community based organizations and other groups

2. ***Develop networking and information sharing opportunities among community based literacy programs***

Community based programs have little opportunity to share information with others working in the literacy field. A national organization could promote networking and information sharing by:

- Developing an information data base about community based literacy organizations and practitioners and making the information available to practicioners

- Providing useful information about programs, resources, practices and services of interest to literacy practitioners through a resource bank

- Sponsoring meetings that bring practitioners together

- Facilitating development of jointly sponsored projects

- Identifying conferences and other opportunities for information sharing, and

- Making presentations at such conferences, or arranging for presentations to be made by community based practitioners.

3. ***Monitor, evaluate and document effective and exemplary practices.***

Not only community based practicioners, but organizations throughout the literacy field can benefit from knowledge of particularly effective programs and practices. This can occur through:

- Conducting evaluative studies of programs

- Disseminating information about these literacy programs and relevant services

- Producing a series of publications, including descriptive reports, evaluation studies, statistical information, conceptual papers, curricula and relevant research on community based literacy.

4. *Increase the amount of information available regarding community based literacy programs and practices*

A problem faced by the entire literacy field is lack of information regarding what has worked for other programs. A national organization could increase the body of information available by:

- Making the data base of information regarding the structure and operation of community based programs available to all interested groups

- Building a file of community based program practices, that would be available for review by any program interested in learning specific "how-to's" regarding a given area of program operation;

- Providing newsletter columns or features that provide regular updates on literacy activities.

5. *Provide assistance in areas of program weakness*

In addition to a need for assistance in marketing (as suggested at the meeting of literacy groups in Raleigh), there are clear needs for improvement in testing, participatory learning techniques, materials, evaluation and fundraising. A national organization could help by:

- Creating technical assistance materials focused on methodology

- Developing and conducting a structured training program in the methods and practice of community based literacy

- Providing or brokering direct technical assistance to programs

- Making available direct support through minigrants

To implement these recommendations effectively, a self-supporting center of services and support for community based literacy organizations and practitioners could be established. The center would maintain a small permanent staff, supported through fees for services and publication sales.

The center would provide a single point of information dissemination to respond to literacy providers' need for better and more thorough knowledge about community based programs. Even more importantly, it would provide an ongoing structure of support for community based literacy organizations and for the important work that they do.